

Characteristics of Adult Children of Alcoholics

- 1) We guess at what normal behavior is. Because of our environment, we had no role models for normalcy, so we acted the way we saw other people act, people we thought were normal, and continue this performance into our adult lives.
- 2) We have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end; we procrastinate. Procrastination in the usual sense is the result of laziness. Adult children of alcoholics have never been taught how to solve a problem in systematic, manageable amounts. It was always all or nothing. Consequently, we don't have adult life skills.
- 3) We lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth. Lies, specifically lies of denial, were used to benefit the alcoholics and para alcoholics of our homes.
- 4) We judge ourselves without mercy. Since there is no way for us to meet the unattainable standards of perfection we have internalized from childhood, we are always falling short of the mark we have set for ourselves. If we are responsible for some positive outcome we dismiss it by saying, "Oh, that was easy," and so on. This is often confused with humility but is actually poor self-esteem. We should keep our poor self-esteem in mind when taking the Fourth and Fifth steps.
- 5) We have difficulty having fun. For most of us having fun was just a childhood fantasy. We were always imprisoned by the anger and hostility of alcoholism, even if physically removed from the alcoholic, the disease was already part of us.
- 6) We take ourselves very seriously. The normal spontaneity of childhood was squashed so many years ago by the pressure to be adult. Living with one or more addicts forced us to be on guard constantly. Seriousness was the only option. Now we can't have fun.
- 7) We have difficulty with intimate relationships. For most of us the only reference of intimate relationships was that of our parents. Our inconsistent parent child relationships caused us to feel an overwhelming fear of abandonment. We are left too inexperienced and fearful to let ourselves get close to anyone.
- 8) We overreact to changes over which we have no control. As young children the addict's life was inflicted on us as part of our environment. Our only recourse was to try to take control totally. Now any change which we are unaware of or have no control over leaves us feeling desperate and vulnerable.
- 9) We constantly seek approval and affirmation. The love we received as children was very erratic. The affirmations we didn't get on a day to day basis as children, we interpreted as negative, leaving us with low self images. If someone likes us, gives us affirmation and accepts us, we usually judge them worthless. Our low self images thrive on this.
- 10) Because of our secretive childhood sufferings, we thought that things were always better in the "house next door." NOBODY could possibly feel the same way as we did. Therefore, we felt unique, not a part of the group, and always looking in through an imaginary barrier.
- 11) We are super responsible or super irresponsible. So much of our lives are all or nothing when trying to please our parents we did more and more and more; some of us realized early in our childhood, that there simply was no pleasing them, so we did nothing. We people please until we burn out for two basic reasons; one, because we don't have a realistic sense of our own capabilities or, two because if we say NO, we're afraid someone might find out how inadequate we feel and no longer like us.
- 12) We are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved. Since starting a relationship is so difficult and frightening, when we do so we expect it to be permanent. This loyalty is usually caused by fear of abandonment. At home we always "hung in there" enabling the addict and denying the disease.
- 13) We are impulsive. As children our impulsivity was usually denied or covered up by our parents. We seldom suffered the consequences for impulsivity, leaving us with no deterrent, and we allow our impulsive behavior to continue in our adult lives.